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THE CAREER OF EDWARD F. LEWIS

FRANKLIN F. LEWIS

Edward F. Lewis was born July 16, 1821 in Groton, New London County, Connecticut, where his early boyhood years were lived. When he was nine years old his parents moved to Cortland County, New York. Here at the age of sixteen he was bound as an apprentice to a shoe manufacturer for a term of three years. He had served two years of this apprenticeship when in 1839 his father, Abel Franklin Lewis, returned from Wisconsin, where he had developed a water power and built a sawmill, and announced that he had decided to remove with his family into that section. Not wishing to leave his son Edward behind, he procured his release from the apprenticeship contract by the payment to the master shoemaker of one hundred dollars.

Abel Lewis returned to Wisconsin with his family in the spring of 1839, the overland trip having been made with an ox team and covered wagon. The water power and mill were located on Turtle Creek in what is now known as the town of Turtle, Rock County. The mill was on the southern side of the creek, the home directly across the creek near the end of the bridge which was located at this point. This bridge has since been replaced by a steel structure. A year or two later the mill was converted into a flour mill. My father has told of the hours he tended to the grinding in this mill, often at night, when it seemed he could scarcely keep awake.

Here he was working when Deacon Stephen Barrett with his wife and nine daughters came from Ashtabula County, Ohio, and settled in Clinton, the adjoining town on the west. Of course the young people soon became acquainted. For Edward this acquaintance ripened into an engagement of marriage with Betsy L. Barrett, the second oldest daughter.

The wedding ceremony was performed April 19, 1841 by Elder Henry Topping of the Baptist Church, of which both young people were members. After the wedding feast the bridegroom took his bride to the home of his father in Turtle, where he had made arrangements to live and continue his work in the mill. Here the young people lived for eight years, and here their first three children were born to them; the second of the three boys died in infancy.

In the fall of 1848 when the California gold fever was at its height the imagination of the people of the Middle West was so stimulated that parties were formed in almost every section to make the trip across the plains on the approach of the coming spring. Among these enthusiasts was the "Lewis Party" as it was later called, which was organized with its headquarters in Milwaukee. Mr. Abel Franklin Lewis became a member of this party and was later elected its captain.

It will be readily understood that Edward also became interested in the project, as the subject was a matter of common discussion about the family table. He did become so imbued with the spirit of the venture that he proposed to my mother that he, too, join in the "quest for the Golden Fleece."

"Husband," she replied, "You may go if you think best; but if you do go, you must take me and the children with you. We cannot be left alone in this strange land."

My father replied to the effect that they would keep together and would establish themselves in a home of their own on the Government lands then being opened to settlement in the interior of Wisconsin.

About the first of June the following year, 1849, he put their household goods into a covered wagon and with his wife and two little boys, Judson six years old and Stephen ten months, with a yoke of oxen at the front for motive power and a cow, which my mother's parents had given them, tied at the rear to furnish milk by the wayside, they set forth to find that new home which was to be "their very own."

In due time they arrived at the portage between the Fox and the Wisconsin rivers, at the lower end of which stood Fort Winnebago. Here my father learned that desirable lands could be had northwest of that vicinity so he decided to look in that direction. The next afternoon in making the ford across the Big Slough, as it was called, about five miles from the portage, his wagon became stalled in the middle of the stream. He unhitched the oxen and took them to the shore he had just left and turned them loose to feed; he then built a fire under a large tree at a camping place near by and carried mother and the children to the shore where he had decided that, by force of circumstances, they must remain over night. A flock of blackbirds attracted his attention and taking his gun he soon had enough of them to give the whole family a blackbird stew for their supper. The following afternoon found them on the farther bank of the little stream known as Beaver Creek, so called because of a dam the beavers had built across the stream, which the little animals were still using. That evening as they were preparing their supper a couple of teamsters who were returning from the pineries farther north stopped near them and asked if they might join them in the evening meal. In the morning they insisted upon paying for the service they had received and advised my parents to remain where they were and open a wayside hotel for the accommodation of the travelers who were passing back and forth between the lumber mills farther north and the source of their supplies farther south. They called attention to the fact that this was one of the favorite camping places on the line.

This suggestion was adopted. The wagon box was placed on the ground under the tree, and the family made their home therein while the contemplated house for home and hotel was being built. After six weeks of chopping in the woods near by, sufficient logs were cut and prepared for the purpose, and a building bee was announced. Invitations were extended to

the settlers within a radius of five or six miles, and at the appointed time the "raising" was begun. Before noon the logs were all in place. Lumber and shingles having been provided, the roof and floors were soon laid, and the family moved into their new home—"their very own." A signpost was set up in front and a crescent-shaped crosspiece attached to it upon which the name selected had been painted—"The Pinery Exchange." Into this home a little more than a year later the writer of this article was born. Upon the organization of the township, which was effected November 18, 1852, the name Lewiston was selected in honor of Postmaster Lewis, who was the third settler in the town and in whose house the meetings preliminary to the organization were held.

Edward F. Lewis was living in this home in the town of Lewiston in the fall of 1856 when he was elected to the office of sheriff of Columbia County. The first of the January following he entered upon the duties of the office and moved his family into the residence portion of the jail building which was located in Portage City, the county seat. The main portion of the building, which was constructed of sandstone blocks, was about thirty-eight or forty feet square, two stories in height, with a flat roof. In the rear was an annex containing dining room and kitchen with sleeping rooms above. The main entrance was at the center in front. Directly opposite this entrance, guarded by a heavy oak door with strong locking device, was the stairway leading to the second story in which was located the jail proper. In front of the entrance door was a porch platform about six feet square from which two or three steps led to the ground.

The location of the jail was at the east side of the city overlooking the low grounds comprising the portage between the Fox and the Wisconsin rivers; between these rivers a canal had been constructed and owing to the difference in the level of the waters between these rivers locks had been placed at either end of the canal to control the flow of water. A flour

mill was built just below the lower lock near the Fox River, the power to operate it being taken from the head obtained there.

Several houses had been erected on the higher ground across the river from Fort Winnebago on the south shore. One of these houses belonged to Jean Baptiste Dubay, a half blood Indian, who lived there with his Indian wife. Dubay had located there some years before and opened trade with the Indians, the American Fur Company furnishing him with goods. This house was erected by him under the impression that he had the right of "squatter's privilege" to claim and occupy the land.

Later the flour mill was sold to Reynolds and Craigh. They commenced erection of another house on land to which Dubay felt he had prior right; he therefore made earnest protest, but without avail, as the workmen continued with their construction. One evening after the workmen had retired, Dubay took his ax and chopped down the studding that had been erected during the day. Mr. Reynolds learned of this action and came over immediately to look into the matter. He returned to the Dubay home and the two became engaged in a heated discussion. Dubay's wife came out and joined in the discussion. Reynolds resented this intrusion and made remarks to her which Dubay considered insulting. Dubay then went into the house and returning with his gun in his hand ordered Reynolds off the premises. Dubay claimed Reynolds was under the influence of liquor and that a piece of board which he had in his hand was raised in a threatening manner. The gun was then fired, killing Reynolds instantly. Dubay went back into his house and closed the door; but no one ventured to follow him.

My father's version of the continuation of the affair was substantially as follows:

One evening as I was sitting on the steps in front of the jail a wagonload of men came from the city and called to me

as they drove rapidly by the jail: "Dubay has shot Reynolds and we are going out to lynch him!" My team, attached to a light buggy, stood at the hitching post near the corner of the building; into the seat I sprang and drove rapidly to the scene of the shooting, passing the other men on the way. I found a crowd of people about the house, Dubay being inside. Entering at once I told Dubay to hurry with me to avoid the mob that was coming out to lynch him. He seemed glad to accompany me; and the men at the door offered no hindrance.

My own team being winded by the fast drive out, I commandeered a rig standing near, helped Dubay, who was a very large man weighing over three hundred pounds, into the buggy, and taking the tie strap in my hand ran along ahead of the horse, not daring to trust the rig to carry the two of us. The road which I had decided to take was only a wheel track along the north side of the canal; it had never been worked and was so rough I was sure that the men of the mob would not try to follow us. It was direct, however, and considerably shorter than the regular road on the south side; by taking this road I had planned to avoid meeting the mob that was bent on lynching my prisoner.

We hurried in this way as best we might till the buggy broke down under the excessive strain; then we ran side by side, reaching the jail safely. Hurrying up the stairway I locked my prisoner in an inner cell, locked the door to the outer cell room, ran down the stairs, closed the door at the foot, and was just in time to close and lock the outer door behind me and turn and face the angry mob as it approached the steps. For when they reached the scene of the shooting and saw that their quarry had flown and by what route, they sprang into their wagon and hurried back the way they had come, hoping to intercept me at the bridge crossing the canal near the jail.

As I turned the key in the door behind me and faced the mob of madly excited men whose one thought was to avenge the violent death of a fellow citizen and friend by a deed of

even greater violence on their part—a reversal to a condition of lawlessness in concerted action—with the thought in mind of responsibility to my prisoner as well as the protection of society against its own self, I undertook to speak to the men before me: But Mason, the leader, shouted to his followers, saying, “Come on, boys; let’s finish our job!” and started for the door at my back. As he reached the porch level he put out his arm to brush me aside. I had in my right coat pocket the pair of handcuffs I had taken with me to the arrest of Dubay; involuntarily these were in my hand and I gave him a blow on the side of the head which knocked him back into the crowd.

Then, in the lull which followed I addressed the men saying, “Men, do you realize what you would do? This man, Dubay, is defenseless; he is under the care of the law. It is my duty to protect him to the full extent of my power and to call upon every one of you as law-abiding citizens to aid me in the discharge of this responsibility which you yourselves have placed upon me. I implore you as you value the peace and protection of society for yourselves and for your families that you go quietly to your homes.” I further called their attention to the fact that my wife was lying in the room at their left with a babe scarcely twenty-four hours old. I urged them, as they loved their own, to give heed to the urgency of the situation.

The greater part of them did retire, but a number remained about the building all night. The next day, leaving a guard at the jail, I went to town to call a posse to aid me in the further discharge of my duty as custodian of the peace of the community; I also secured a half bushel of revolvers and a number of guns.

While making these arrangements my friend Mason, of the evening before, addressed me saying, “What are you going to do with these?”

I replied that I intended to protect to the full extent of my ability those whom the law had placed in my keeping.

He said, "You don't mean you would go so far as to use these on your friends?"

I replied that I certainly would do so if the occasion required it. I further said it was very lucky for him that I did not have one of these weapons in my hand when he approached me as he did last night.

These weapons and a number of long-handled pitchforks were taken to the jail. Ugly rumors were in circulation that made it obligatory upon me to prepare against extreme emergency. A number of men were sworn into service as special deputies; and a force was kept on guard in the jail day and night till the excitement had passed away. Guards with weapons in their hands were maintained on both first and second floors of the building as well as upon the roof. The long-handled pitchforks were to be used to throw down scaling ladders should any such be set against the building.

Word came to me later that after I had made the plea to the mob the leaders held a consultation and decided that they must give attention to the extreme family situation mentioned; that when Dubay came to trial he would have to be taken to the court room and that would be their time to get him.

As I remember my father's version of the appearance of Dubay in court it was as follows:

The trial of Dubay was listed on the calendar of our court for its fall session. I arranged with the judge that information should not be given the public of the day Dubay would appear before the court to answer to the charge against him and to make his plea thereto.

Upon the date arranged I took Dubay and with a couple of deputies as guards we entered a closed carriage and were driven by a circuitous route to the court building. Upon our entrance into the court room several men arose to go out; but they were stopped by deputies whom I had placed in the room

with orders that no one should be allowed to leave the room or to pass any signals through the windows while Dubay was present.

He was presented to the court, the charge against him was read, and his plea made. He was then hurried into the carriage and rapidly driven back to the jail, where he was held pending the issue of the trial. I have no remembrance of a second trial. There is, however, an impression in my mind of arrangements for getting Dubay to the state prison at Waupun; this impression may have been due to certain plans my father had developed through which to get Dubay safely to Waupun in the event of prison sentence having been pronounced against him. However, Dubay was finally acquitted.

At the close of my father's term of office as sheriff he engaged in mercantile trade in Portage; after two years he closed out this business and went back to his homestead in Lewiston. During the Civil War he served as deputy provost marshal. Of the trying times of those days he used to relate many incidents that were full of human interest. In 1870 he virtually founded the business later known as the Lewis Knitting Company.

Mr. Lewis died in his old homestead in Lewiston in 1885. By his ready comprehension of situations about him, his capacity to adapt himself to meet them, and through the sterling qualities of his character he commanded the respect and esteem of those who knew him. This is evidenced by the fact that there was scarcely a year in all his residence in the county when his name did not appear upon the official list of town or county. He was a worthy representative of that pioneer element which laid the foundation for the present success and prosperity of our state.